

VZCZCXRO1919
PP RUEHDBU RUEHIK RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #0564/01 0511244
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 201244Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6250
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3671
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3474

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 000564

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, S/CT,
EUR/RPM, INR
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG,
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CSTC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [NATO](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: ANA RETENTION RATES SHOW IMPROVEMENT; MORE WORK
AHEAD

¶1. (SBU) Summary: For the Afghan National Army to grow rapidly to the target strength of 70,000 personnel by December 2008, traditionally high AWOL and attrition rates need to be reduced. The Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) are working hard to lower these rates through a combination of financial incentives and implementation of programs designed to foster improved morale. The size of training class kandaks (battalions) in basic military training has also increased from a low of 600/class in January 2006 to 2,000/class in January 2007 with further increases being considered. CSTC-A,s Commanding General, MG Durbin has briefed the MOD Chief of Army Staff General Bismullah Khan and the MOD leadership on the need for increased MOD efforts to improve retention rates. There have recently been some signs of success, although work remains to bring the rates in line with target figures to reach the 70,000 goal by December 2008. Support from Coalition partners - in particular in fully meeting the ISAF requirement for Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) - is essential. End summary.

¶1. According to CSTC-A statistics, as of January 31 the assigned number of ANA personnel was 32,285. This includes 2,419 at MOD/General Staff; 1,372 at sustaining institutions; 6,818 at intermediate commands; and 21,676 in Corps Forces (five Regional Combat Corps and Air Corps). An additional 7,421 personnel were in initial training, of which the majority (6,330) was at Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC). The number of trained ANA present for duty was approximately 25,400. Of these approximately 2,900 were AWOL and 4,000 were on authorized leave.

AWOL and Present For Duty Rates

12. (SBU) AWOL rates for those ANA personnel not assigned to Corps Forces commands were negligible, due to a combination of factors including living closer to home and not being deployed to combat duty. For the Corps Forces, as of January 31, of the 21,676 assigned Corps Force personnel, 15,033 were present for duty. This included 2,859 AWOL and 2,882 on authorized leave. CSTC-A reports that AWOL rates have dropped somewhat for the five regional corps since early 2006, with notable improvements in the 201 and 209 Corps. Whereas reported AWOLs Army-wide on January 15, 2006 were 16 percent (3,133 of 19,345), the reported rate for January 31, 2007 was 13 percent (2,882 of 21,676). (Note: This figure includes a two percent AWOL rate for the Air Corps, a unit that was still statistically insignificant in January 2006.) AWOL is defined as absent without leave for 60 days or less. After 60 days enlisted personnel are dropped from the roles while officers are dropped after 30 days. This is reflected in the statistics as a drop in the number of assigned personnel. (Note: The statistics show that the Corps Forces assigned strength grew by 2,161 personnel in the 12 months from January 2006 to January 2007 (19,515 to 21,676). The slow growth in Corps Forces was due to a variety of factors including attrition, AWOL rates and combat losses, but also to an increased emphasis on filling other commands. In particular, the Air Corps grew from 170 personnel in January 2006 to 1,222 in January 2007. The total growth in assigned personnel in the ANA was 5,421 over the 12-month period (26,864 to 32,285). End note.)

13. (SBU) Breakdown of AWOL rates by Corps is as follows:

KABUL 00000564 002 OF 004

201 (Northeast): 7 percent
203 (Southeast): 15 percent
205 (South): 18 percent
207 (West): 18 percent
209 (North): 10 percent
Air Corps: 2 percent

Present for duty rates were as follows:

201: 83 percent of assigned, 60.4 percent of authorized
203: 74 percent of assigned, 49.9 percent of authorized
205: 66 percent of assigned, 45.6 percent of authorized
207: 62 percent of assigned, 39.6 percent of authorized
209: 78 percent of assigned, 52.4 percent of authorized.
Air Corps: 90 percent of assigned, 38.5 percent of authorized.

(Note: The present for duty percentage is calculated against the current authorization numbers for a 50,000-man force. Future comparisons against a 70,000-man ANA would result in a decrease of all Present For Duty percentages until additional recruitment/deployments catch up. (Of the 50,000-man ANA, approximately 30,000 are designated for the Corps Forces; of a 70,000-man ANA, the number would increase to approximately 50,000.) End Note.)

Reasons for Improvement

14. (SBU) The lower AWOL rates for 209 and particularly 201 Corps are significant. Both those corps have been in the fight - 201 Corps in the Eastern border area, 209 Corps in rotation to the South. For each of

these corps, two factors have positively impacted morale and consequently resulted in lower AWOL rates:

- Effective partnering between the ANA and Coalition counterparts (including German OMLTs);
- Development and implementation of a Red/Amber/Green rotation cycle of active duty/training/reserve. For 209 Corps, this has come about informally as troops are rotated into and out of the fight in the South. 201 Corps has implemented a more systematic rotation cycle. Embedded trainers report that the morale boost for troops is significant as the red/amber/green cycle provides a predictable schedule to the soldiers. They understand that they will receive a specific amount of time to recover from the stress of battle.

¶15. (SBU) CSTC-A cites several other factors for the gradually improving AWOL rates:

- Proactive efforts by the Afghan Minister of Defense and Chief of General Staff to replace underperforming ANA leadership and significantly improve the quality of life standards;
- Implementation of pay reforms that increase ANA salaries;
- Establishment of ANA delegations tasked with identifying, tracking, and returning AWOL personnel. These delegations, which have just begun their work, will engage with local elders, sponsors, and mullahs in the home communities of individuals that are AWOL.

KABUL 00000564 003 OF 004

Reenlistment Rate

¶16. (SBU) Another factor impacting ANA growth is the reenlistment rate. This was predicted to be a problem, as soldiers recruited in 2003 reached the end of their three-year contracts. Early indications confirmed this concern - the overall ANA reenlistment rate from March to December 2006 was 39 percent (859 of 2,183 elected to reenlist). Improvement appears to have begun, however. For the month of January 2007, the reenlistment rate was 69 percent (157 of 228). CSTC-A assesses that the improved rate is due primarily to financial incentives implemented in the ANA pay reforms. These include a USD 100 reenlistment bonus, a significant pay raise (USD 35-55/mo) when entering the fourth year of ANA service, and the prospect of future longevity pay raises. The factors listed in paragraphs 4 and 5 also contributed to higher reenlistment rates.

Kandak Size Increased

¶17. (SBU) Finally, in order to rapidly increase the size of the ANA, CSTC-A has worked with MOD to increase the size of the ANA recruit kandaks. Whereas Kandak 50 (January 2006) had 654 personnel, Kandak 62 (January 2007) included 2,004 personnel. (Note: The larger kandaks, which are part of the expansion plan briefed to Washington by CSTC-A, have put a strain on KMTC resources and personnel. MOD and CSTC-A are working to remedy this. End note.) The success in obtaining larger numbers of recruits for the ANA is attributable in part to recruiting conferences led by high-ranking MOD personnel, which are held two to three times per month in various provinces. These conferences have attracted strong attendance and have been reported favorably in the Afghan media, including television news.

The Way Ahead

18. (SBU) Continuing to bring down attrition and AWOL rates will be critical to the success of building the ANA. In a mid-December 2006 briefing to ANA Chief of Army Staff Bismullah Khan, MOD leadership, and then-CFC-A Commanding General Eikenberry, CSTC-A Commanding General Durbin and the CSTC-A Defense Reform Directorate staff stated that to reach 70,000 ANA by December 31, 2008, AWOL rates will have to drop to 10% nationwide and retention rates will have to rise to 75 percent. (Note: This estimate was based on a kandak size of 2,000. CSTC-A is considering the possibility of even larger kandaks - up to 3,000 - if facilities and resources allow. End note.) CSTC-A Commanding General Durbin noted that while the USG can supply the equipment and trainers, the Afghan government must commit to retaining the troops. The MOD officials agreed that more must be done to "plug the leaky bucket." Improvements in AWOL and retention rates since this meeting confirm the commitment of the MOD and CSTC-A. However, reaching the ambitious targets set in the December meeting, especially the 10 percent AWOL rate, will not be easy. Critical to the effort is international mentoring and partnering of ANA troops, both at the command level and through ETTs/OMLTs. At present, of the 69 OMLTs that non-US NATO committed to, less than one-third (20) have been filled, and of those 20 only 13 have been validated, or certified fully mission-ready. Fully resourcing

KABUL 00000564 004 OF 004

the OMLT requirement will be essential not only to improving the quality of the ANA, but also to improving retention.
NEUMANN